

An A to Z of learning

E is for...environment and eggs

Saving water, and using recycled materials for creative activities, teaches the children at **Rachel Keeling Nursery School** about green issues, while spring means eggs and pancakes

THE ENVIRONMENT

At school and in our community, we want to make a difference. We know that we can support not only our children's thinking but also that of our families. So, we decided to make pledges we could commit to at school and at home to help protect the planet.

After reflecting on our use (and overuse?) of water in school – as a team and with the children – we decided to turn off our garden taps and use water only to water the plants, fruit and vegetables.

Each morning, children help staff to half fill one tub of water, which they can use for imaginative play. Now they use smaller containers and think about how they want to use the water.

We then asked families and staff to turn off their taps when they brush their teeth. Did you know doing this can save 6 litres of water per minute?

This extended to not using plastic bags. 'Say no to plastic bags' was our motto around school, and children took this message home and out to the shops as well.

Next we turned our attention to resources in school. In true early years style, we have always worked with recyclable materials. We receive donations from our local community, and our skip-diving staff have rescued many a pallet to use for woodwork or shelving.

Weaving and sewing

We have also used recycled materials to develop children's weaving and sewing skills. Among the resources used were old bike tyres, wool and ribbon, as well as fabrics and materials, from fruit packaging to abandoned painted canvases. Smaller weaving frames with netting were also used.

The children worked in pairs, supporting each other to develop their understanding of threading and working with needles. At the end-of-day evaluation meetings,



Making a pancake from one of the discovered recipes

adults commented on the children's high levels of engagement for long periods, as well as the therapeutic nature of the experience.

Some children went on to design and decorate bags. This linked to a community project developing tote bags for Plastic Free Roman Road.

EGGS

Raising chicks

As we follow the rhythms and seasons of the year, in spring we usually work with a farm in Essex to hatch some eggs. The delivery of the eggs (without warning the children) leads to many captivated children.

First, we find out what children know about eggs and record their ideas. A few days of patiently observing the eggs follows, and any movement and sound from within brings great excitement. Children have suggested chicks, crocodiles, even dinosaurs might be inside.

Some yellow beaks usually appear after a couple of days, and when fully hatched the chicks are transferred to a larger heated container. Children refer to information books about lifecycles and create their own book about the lifecycle of the chicks.

Children help care for the chicks (cleaning, feeding and watering them), observe and handle them carefully and talk about how they feel. They are encouraged to notice changes in the chicks' appearance,

such as their size, the colour of their feathers and how they move. We also identify the gender of the chicks. After two weeks, the farmer collects the chicks, and sometimes staff take some to rear at home.

Such enrichment experiences are wonderful in developing language and empathy, but we are always mindful of living creatures and will be reviewing whether this activity is ethically sound.

Making pancakes

Eggs are used in other ways at school: well-being is at the heart of our ethos and, as part of that, nourishment is central too. We are always looking at ways to ensure children develop a positive relationship with food and drink – such as seeing the self-service snack area as a social hub for rich conversations, laughter and joy.

Recently, the children discovered a book about pancakes from around the world and decided to find healthy pancake recipes using a variety of books and the iPad. They found recipes for apple, vegan, sugar-free, courgette and carrot cake pancakes! Shoppers of the week collated lists and went shopping for the ingredients.

Children were supported in measuring out the dry and wet ingredients, sometimes using cups and at other times digital scales. One-handed tools were used to cut, chop, grate and mash ingredients, and children were very vocal in sharing their observations of the process and the changes in state of the pancakes.

The following week, some children were supported to make pancakes independently, using a visual recipe and measure, mixing and cooking with minimal support. Watch out, *British Bake Off!* ■

Rachel Keeling Nursery School is an Outstanding setting in Bethnal Green, east London

Getting up close with a newly hatched chick; and one of the children's bag designs

